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Partnerships to Fight Poverty

CHOICES

MAGAZINE • MARCH 2002

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Latvia's President
Vaira Vike-Freiberga

EMPOWERING WOMEN

In Bangladesh, Cuba, Jordan, Madagascar and Tajikistan

AFGHANISTAN

The Challenges Ahead

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Of Hopes and Commitments

Our arrival in Afghanistan was anything but easy. As we made our way over the mountains toward Bagram airbase, north of Kabul, our pilot suddenly made a stomach-churning, "corkscrew" descent into the Shamali Valley. And so, with some unexpected excitement, began the visit of the delegation from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), led by our Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown.

Photo: Wana Karadaghi/UNDP

Amid the ruins: Djibril Diallo (right) being briefed in Kabul.

Once the breadbasket of Afghanistan and inhabited mostly by farming families, the Shamali is better known today as a death trap for the unwary because it is riddled with landmines. We were told that at least 30 civilians a week are killed by stepping on them, as displaced Afghan farmers try to reclaim their villages and wheat-fields. Across the country, there are some 10 million landmines—the legacy of 23 years of war. From our view of things, nearly all the buildings near the airport were either roofless, bullet-riddled or both. The 45-kilometre road into Kabul was a trail of abandoned villages, overturned tanks, unexploded bombs and blown-up bridges.

I was accompanying Mr. Malloch Brown on his first official visit to Afghanistan since his appointment as UN coordinator for the international recovery and reconstruction effort in the country. Our first stop on a busy round of meetings with officials, local UN workers and community leaders was Kabul's Babourshour Community Centre, in a rubble-strewn district of the city. There we came across a most striking change from the Taliban period. In a session with local leaders, at a traditional public assembly—or *shura*—women sat upfront, with the men filling in behind them, three rows deep. After years of hiding their faces in public, they now wore scarves over their heads instead, having shed their head-to-toe, veiled dresses, or burqas, which were obligatory until recently.

Saifurah Kurstani, a teacher in pre-Taliban days before outside employment for women was outlawed in 1996, welcomed us. She reminded us that "Afghan women have suffered very much; they have lost their husbands, their friends, their relatives, their jobs and their education." Amid the anguish, she said, they have tried not just to survive but to "live" in this society. "Now we want promises put into action, and we want the rights of women to be restored in Afghanistan in all aspects of social life," said Mrs. Kurstani.

We heard that same message later in the day when we met Hamida Mohammad Ali, a chicken farmer whose small business was all but wiped out during fighting between Taliban and United States-led coalition forces. Debris from a bomb had demolished her chicken coop, killing most of her 1,000 birds and taking away the income she needs to care for her ailing husband and large family. Rather than dwell on her misfortune, she wanted us to know that she was back in business and had built a new chicken coop with rubble from her neighbourhood, after obtaining a small loan.

That sort of determination—the will to prevail in the face of near-total destruction of one's livelihood and community—is being seen across Afghanistan. It is an invitation to the world to do all it can to support the country's rehabilitation. The US$4.5 billion in long-term development assistance pledged in January at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan is a promising start. While such meetings may seem far removed from the lives of people like Saifurah Kurstani and Hamida Mohammad Ali, their right to teach or earn a living as a farmer has a crystal-clear connection to the goals set in Tokyo.

This issue of CHOICES is dedicated to the theme of women's advancement and empowerment. We offer an exclusive interview with the President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the first woman of any former Soviet Republic to become a Head of State. We also hear from leading authorities, including Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, on a host of urgent challenges. And we have stories of the economic and social progress that women are making in Bangladesh, Cuba, Jordan, Madagascar and Tajikistan, which showcase how UNDP and its partners are working with women to help reduce the burden of poverty, a central goal of the broader development agenda.

Djibril Diallo

Cover: Rano Tabarova (foreground) manages Tajikistan's Bonuvon Women's Centre. This UNDP-supported non-governmental organization helps marginalized women to become entrepreneurs. Photo: Clive Shirley/UNDP

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COMMENTARY

Photo: Milan Gazdić/UNDP

Women's Rights and Human Security

The most striking single social, political and economic transformation of the past century has been the emergence of women as leaders in nearly every country and walk of life. But obviously there is still a long way to go. Whether we are talking about women's presence in legislatures, business and education or simply the right to be protected from violence and discrimination, much more needs to be done, in both developed and developing countries, to achieve gender equality.

Nowhere is this more important than in communities trying to recover from civil strife and armed conflict. Although there is growing recognition that women and children bear the heaviest consequences, and there is worldwide evidence of increased gender-based violence in these situations, women's participation in peace processes still remains limited.

In recent years, and especially in the last six months, we have seen new and strengthened partnerships of women uniting for peace. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting these groups, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because they have a unique potential to help resolve some of the world's most intractable conflicts.

In Sierra Leone, for example, women staged a sit-down strike paralyzing the city of Freetown, holding the government accountable for the implementation of the Lomé Peace Accord, and forcing officials to provide daily public briefings. In the Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, women are setting aside ethnic allegiances in new partnerships to help ease local tensions. In the Cordillera area of the Philippines, where indigenous people have struggled for decades to defend their traditions and cultures, women are advocating new rules and mechanisms to align national laws and local custom. In Albania, women have been actively involved in UNDP's 'weapons for development' project that has taken thousands of arms and tons of ammunition out of circulation. They have played a critical role in convincing their communities to surrender weapons.

Through the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), led by Noeleen Heyzer, we are developing innovative ways to challenge the use of tradition as a rationale for continued violence. Projects supported by UNIFEM are demonstrating how women's groups can work with religious leaders and communities to change attitudes and practices towards female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings. Family by family, community by community, these projects are building respect for women and girls and an understanding that gender-based violations are not integral to any tradition or culture.

Some of UNDP's most successful initatives are based on an understanding of the necessary link between sustainable peace building and women's participation in decision-making. In Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania and Uganda, UNDP is supporting efforts by coalitions of non-governmental organizations and parliamentarians to remove legal constraints on women's involvement in political processes. In Pakistan, we are supporting a nationwide information and awareness campaign, including orientation meetings at the grassroots level, to help the government achieve its goal of having women fill at least one-third of seats in local assemblies. In India, which has a similar goal of one-third representation by women in local government, we are giving newly-elected officials training in modern techniques of public administration.

Now, in Afghanistan, we have an historic opportunity to support human rights and the empowerment of women. There, as anywhere else, no arguments of cultural relativism or tactical caution should deflect from the need to help women rapidly better their status. We must ensure not just ambitious efforts to guarantee equal access,

Photo: UNDP

Mark Malloch Brown meets Afghan women.

but also that women be directly integrated into all aspects of planning for the overall recovery effort. There needs to be an especially strong focus on the critical issue of girls' education, which has been neglected for so long. And we are working with Afghan women's groups to help them participate fully in the future governance of the country.

What has happened to women in Afghanistan demonstrates that if a country or community fails to treat women well and protect and promote their human rights, this is one of the best early warning indicators of lack of respect for international norms and standards. We all, in developed and developing countries alike, have a stake in providing choices and opportunities for those who have never had them: education for girls who have been denied it; protection from abuse at home and in the workplace for wives and mothers who have long had to endure it silently; and access to real political and economic power for all women in every country. ■

Mark Malloch Brown is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

INTERVIEW

President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia

In an exclusive interview with CHOICES magazine, Latvia's President Vaira Vike-Freiberga offered her views on gender equality issues, globalization and the human development challenges. She also spoke of the role that UNDP has played in Latvia's efforts to rebuild its institutions and become a more socially integrated nation.

You are the first woman in the history of Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union to have been elected as a head of state. What has living this experience meant to you personally, in terms of affecting your worldview about policies and strategies needed to overcome social and economic challenges?

I am conscious of serving as a role model to women not only in Latvia, but also in many other parts of the world. The decision of the Latvian Parliament to elect a woman president was an important step in applying democracy in practice. It was a reminder to the older Baltic generations and to the one now growing up that democracy means equal access to every position in the land for both men and women. In terms of policy, strategies and priorities, I find it difficult to dissociate my being a woman from the person or individual that I am. I feel that gender is just one of the attributes that defines me as a human being, and I don't see it as playing a primordial role either in my decision-making or in the sense of my country's priorities. I tend to view my commitments as humanistic ones in the fullest sense of the word. For me democracy is a service to human beings regardless of their gender, and in that sense my own gender is not an important issue.

What do you believe to be the most urgent need today when it comes to redressing the balance so that women in civil society and in the political sphere can progress towards gender equality?

In Latvia, as in other countries, we are still facing old-fashioned stereotypes according to which a woman's place is, if not in the home, then certainly not in the higher echelons of decision-making. Women have been working in Latvia for centuries. Everybody recognises and acknowledges that, but the readiness to accept women in higher office and in decision-making has still not penetrated every level of society and is still not universal. It is no different in many other countries. I might even say that Latvia is more progressive than many other countries, including a number of traditional democracies. But we still have a way to go before we reach gender equality in the full understanding of what it means.

As the president of a small nation—one with large and rich national traditions and one whose possibilities indeed drew you back after most of your life away from your native country—what do you see as the most important human development challenges facing your country and region today?

From my own personal experiences and from those of the Latvian people, we have acquired first-hand knowledge of the harm that tyranny brings. But we also have acquired the first-hand experience of how difficult it is to bring about a democratic system. Democracy is expensive in many ways, both in terms of the financial investment in structures and institutions, and in the sense that it requires personal commitment, personal effort, energy, and time on the part of each citizen. Democracy doesn't come for free. One has to work for it, and it is a continuous process. Those who, like the Latvian people, have had a repeated experience of tyranny, I think, may have a clearer understanding of how important it is to struggle against tyranny in the defence of freedom.

Globalization is a powerful trend in the modern world. It is not positive or negative, per se. Engaging in isolationism or underestimating the multifaceted ramifications of globalization would be extremely dangerous.

Latvia joined the United Nations in 1991. You launched UNDP Latvia's 1999 National Human Development Report that focused on the dual challenge—the opportunity and the threat—that globalization poses for Latvia. How do you perceive globalization, when it comes to ensuring equitable development and preserving the national identity of countries?

Globalization is a powerful trend in the modern world. It is not positive or negative, per se. Engaging in isolationism or underestimating the multifaceted ramifications of globalization would be extremely dangerous. Since regaining its independence, Latvia has shown great commitment and determination to rectify the dramatic consequences of its 50-year enforced hibernation. Being a small country, Latvia attaches particular importance to full-fledged membership in global, pan-European and regional international organizations. The United Nations organization was the first global body that we joined in September 1991 after our breakaway from the Soviet Union. Involvement in economic institutions is just as vital for long-term sustainable development. In 1998 Latvia joined the World Trade Organization. We hope to conclude our accession negotiations to the European Union by the end of 2002. We consider these institutions as valuable instruments to enhance our competitiveness in the global environment, to raise our general level of welfare and to ensure the irreversibility of our independence.

Globalization has placed a real and tangible pressure on national identities, regardless of the size of the country. We have to face this reality, and look for creative ways to encourage those values, principles and ideals that are so dear to us. For instance, Latvians consider the safeguarding of their language as a priority. Latvian, as an ancient Indo-European language, is a crucial element of our identity. Therefore, this year, during its presidency of the Council of Europe, Latvia placed special emphasis on the situation of the less widely spoken languages in Europe.

Latvia is making rapid progress towards accession to the European Union. What is your assessment of the role that UNDP has played in support of transition to a modern market-based economy, and the strengthening of democratic institutions and processes? And how do you evaluate your country's participation in the work of the United Nations system on more global issues?

UNDP's assistance and involvement are widely known and greatly appreciated in Latvia. During the first years of Latvia's renewed independence, UNDP played a crucial role in helping us to rebuild our institutions, strengthen our judicial system, implement welfare reform, and increase our administrative capacity. I would like to pay special tribute to the meaningful contribution of UNDP in dealing with the pressing issues of social integration. These included Latvia's transformation from a captive nation under Soviet rule to a democratic and inclusive society, as well as the promotion of Latvian language education, gender equality, and children's rights.

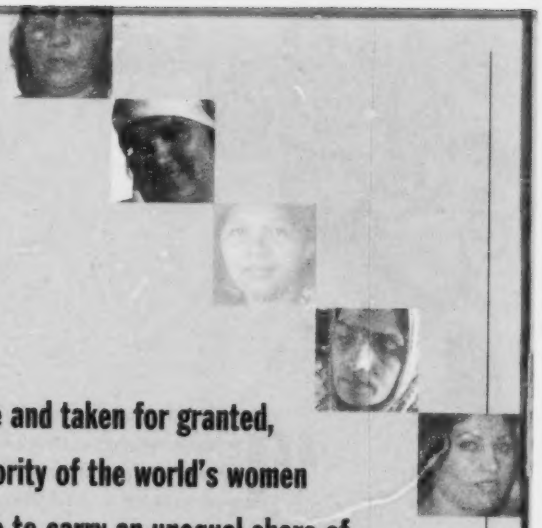
Over the last 10 years, Latvia has acquired a unique experience in nation building, in democratization, in the eradication of the consequences of foreign occupations, and in the creation of an inclusive and socially integrated society. Latvia, along with her neighbours Estonia and Lithuania, is recognized as a success story of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. We are ready and able to share our experience with other countries, and have already started a number of projects in various fields with Croatia, Georgia, Ukraine and others.

Latvia has suffered greatly in its history from a lack of security. During the 20th Century, Latvia experienced numerous foreign occupations and invasions. We place an especially high value on freedom, peace, and security, having been deprived of them for so many decades. Therefore, along with its prospective membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—which Latvia hopes to see confirmed in 2002—Latvia has engaged in peacekeeping as a crucial component of its international commitments. Since 1996 Latvia has participated in international peacekeeping or peace monitoring missions in Albania, Bosnia, Georgia, Kosovo and Macedonia. Despite the small size of our country, we have succeeded in providing a meaningful contribution to these missions.

Latvia is gradually developing the capability to participate in humanitarian assistance projects. For instance, in November 2001, Latvia dispatched humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees network. ■

Contributor: Jan Sand Sorensen, UNDP Resident Representative in Latvia.

The Hard Path to Gender Equality



BY ASTER ZAOUDE

There have been profound changes in the status of women during the past two decades. Gender gaps in education and health are narrowing and women are entering the labour force in large numbers, thus breaking the barriers that confined them to household reproductive functions and self-employment. But this progress is slow and uneven. No country in the world can claim to have fully achieved gender equality.

Two-thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are female. Of the world's one billion poorest people, about 60 percent are women and girls. Women represent a growing proportion of people living with HIV/AIDS, and in countries with high HIV prevalence young women and girls with little or no education are at much higher risk than men. Over one-quarter of all women have suffered one form or another of physical abuse and 80 percent of the victims of armed conflicts are women and children.

On another front, there is the phenomenon of partiality in favour of market-driven growth that sees tradable goods and services take precedence over social capital and unpaid work, which is mainly performed by women. This bias excludes women's economic and social contributions from the macro-economic framework. It assumes that women will continue to manage what can be termed the care economy, with or without support. Invisible and taken for granted, the majority of the world's women continue to carry an unequal share of the burdens of poverty.

There are two approaches to achieving development that is truly gender-equal: One which assumes that adjustments can be made to existing development policies and institutions by highlighting women's concerns, such as bringing more women into the workforce and giving them greater representation in elected bodies. And there is another approach that raises fundamental issues of equity, and operates from the recognition that gender inequalities are embedded in institutional principles and processes that need to be transformed, not patched over.

The international community made strong commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women at United Nations conferences during the past decade. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action focuses on poverty, conflict and recovery situations, human rights, the impact of macro-economic policy and globalization, HIV/AIDS, and access to information and communications technologies. These are all priorities that closely track the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) own core practice areas.

UNDP is dedicated to translating these commitments into concrete policies that produce results. The agency's services are intended to promote women's demonstrated capacity to cope with poverty, exercise leadership, sustain fragile ecosystems, produce and maintain human capital and respond to crisis and adversity. UNDP staff are responsible for ensuring that gender concerns are part of the mainstream within UNDP's fields of practice. This is a central objective and one not simply limited to adding or integrating more women into development-related activities. Rather, it is about the transformation of laws, policies, institutions, structures and forms of behaviour that underpin gender inequality. Gender equality is also a core principle of UNDP's management of its own human resources.

The newly established Thematic Trust Fund on Gender of UNDP is a mechanism that supports strategic intervention, the focus being on policy dialogue, advocacy, networking, capacity building and partnership development. UNDP is well positioned to mainstream gender-responsive policies and programmes throughout its six practice areas. It draws on the wealth of experiences and knowledge from its network of country offices around the world as it links knowledge with practice. This Trust Fund focuses on four lines of service:

Invisible and taken for granted, the majority of the world's women continue to carry an unequal share of the burdens of poverty.

- Strategies for poverty reduction, including ones that deal with macroeconomic issues and globalization;
- Statistics and indicators for tracking progress towards national targets including through "gender-audit" of budgets;
- Legal reforms and the building of institutional capacity to address women's human rights, including land and property rights, legal protection and advocacy;
- Assessment of women's vulnerability, measurement of the increasing feminization of poverty, the impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis, ways of unleashing women's creative responses, including their incorporation into peace building and conflict recovery efforts.

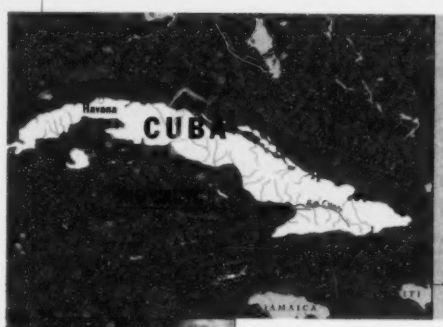
UNDP promotes the establishment of gender theme groups in every country in which it works. Through its strategic partnership with the UN Development Fund for Women, it builds on innovative approaches and expands its capacities to mainstream gender issues. UNDP is in a unique position to broker actions that build synergy for progress towards gender equity and the building of alliances among agencies as well as between governments, civil society organizations and the broad donor community.

Ultimately, gender equality is a measure of sound governance because when development is not "en-gendered" it can only be endangered. ■

Aster Zaoude is a Senior Gender Adviser at UNDP New York.

Emeralds of the Cauto

BY ALBERTO D. PÉREZ



A mother and daughter work hand-in-hand.

Rio Cauto, Cuba

"I've always wanted to have lots of children, but I never thought I'd have quite as many as this," Magaly Jorge told me, running her fingers lovingly across a little palm tree seedling.

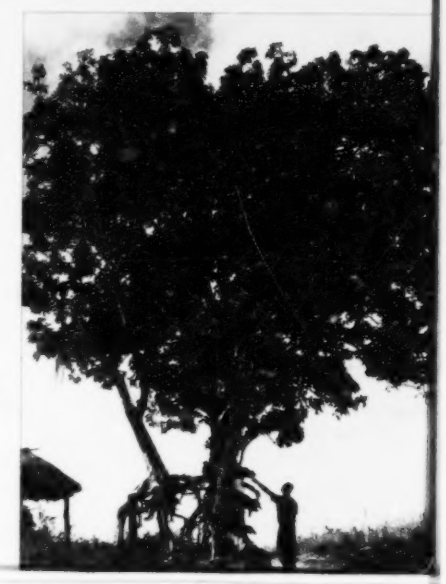
As it turns out, Mrs. Jorge—one of the first women to be put in charge of a tree plantation in Cuba's Cauto river basin—has just two children of her own, teenagers who attend an agricultural college in their hometown of Rio Cauto, on the banks of the country's biggest river. But she likes to think of the tens of thousands of trees on her 16-hectare woodland farm as "her children," too. And with good reason. For the reforestation project she is responsible for—in the hardscrabble eastern province of Granma—is proving to be a remarkably successful experiment in support of the region's environmental rehabilitation and economic and social progress.

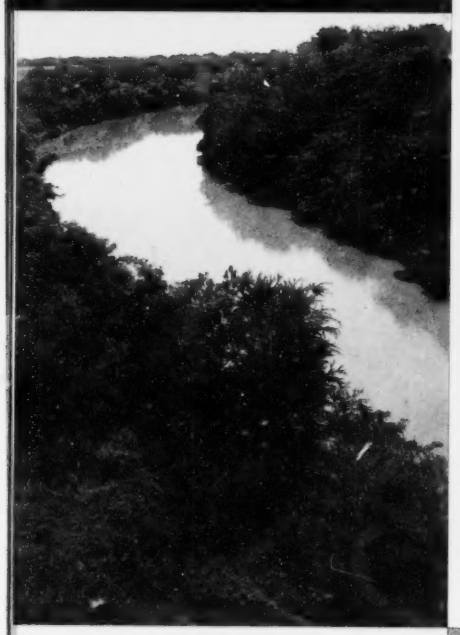
"The plantations have been a revelation," says Julio Zayas, deputy director of Empresa Forestal Integral Bayamo, which provincial authorities in Granma hired to oversee the reforestation effort. In view of the magnitude of the challenge, the company sought assistance under a Local Human Development Programme sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the UN Office for Project Services, with co-funding from the Government of Italy.

The project turns out to be perfectly suited to the Cauto. The 372-kilometre river, which flows across much of the eastern portion of the country before emptying into the Caribbean Sea, has been both a saviour and destroyer, depending on the vagaries of nature. While its waters irrigate fertile plains and nourish crops of all kinds in a landscape of striking beauty, the Cauto can also be a conduit for tragedy. During storms such as the devastating Hurricane Flora in 1962 and Hurricane George in 1998—the erosion of crevices and gullies from flash floods causes major landslides. To address this problem, the Government of Cuba decided to build a system of dams and, in 1998, initiated a reforestation scheme to halt erosion, protect the water table and combat drought. More than three years and 4.5 million trees later, these goals are well on the way to being accomplished.

According to Mr. Zayas, as of late 2001 in Granma province, 69 of a proposed 112 tree plantations—ranging between 16 and 33 hectares each—had been established in the Cauto river basin. Women have played a key role in this development and in planning for future activities, whether as individual plantation managers themselves or the partners of managers. "Without their participation, the progress that's been achieved would not have been possible," Mr. Zayas says. His company provides the plantation

Stark evidence of erosion.





Magaly Jorge is one of many women in eastern Cuba playing vital roles as tree farm managers along the Cauto River.

Photo: Ahmed Velázquez/UNDP

has a colour television and a music system, all of which are provided free of charge. In areas without electricity, solar panels have been installed. "The quality of housing and living conditions ensure that the population will remain in the countryside," says Ms. Cassisi.

In the kitchen of her new home, while making coffee, Mrs. Jorge tells a visitor: "I'm happy to have a good roof over me and my family, and that my work is recognized and the pay is all right. I'm also glad I can show that women can do any job, no matter how hard."

UNDP has considerable experience in providing support for forestry development in Cuba, taking advantage of the fact that this country is one of a very few to have succeeded in bucking a global trend towards the loss of forestry resources. (In 1959, 14 percent of Cuba was forested; by 2000 this had risen to 21.7 percent). UNDP has been helping since 1969 to strengthen Cuba's forestry sector, while promoting integrated management of ecosystems in the country. It continued these initiatives in the 1990s through support for the implementation of a Forestry Act, and establishment of a National Forestry Service and Forest Ranger Unit.

UNDP is now taking a further step in its continuing support for the forestry sector. Luis Gómez Echeverri, the UNDP Resident Representative in Cuba, says that despite limited resources, much can be done to bolster the efforts of the direct beneficiaries—such as the tree plantation managers. "We are trying to make this programme a reality by supporting people with projects that have real impact; community-based projects that can be repeated elsewhere."

"Forest plantations are among hundreds of decentralized local development initiatives implemented since the programme came into existence, with more than a half million beneficiaries," says Mr. Gómez Echeverri. "Reforestation in the Cauto basin not only contributes to a healthier environment in the region but serves as a protective barrier against further onslaughts by the river. We are very pleased to see that women like Magaly Jorge and so many others are playing an increasingly important role in this noble endeavour."

workers with technical assistance, seedlings, fertilizers, tools, clothing, and transportation. They are paid on a piece-work basis and their performance is evaluated monthly.

Rita Cassisi, head of the Local Human Development Programme in Granma, explains that even though plantation workers are employees of Empresa Forestal Integral they defend the plantations as if *they* were the owners. "The purpose of the programme, the government and the company is to offer the workers better living and working conditions," she says. The programme builds a sturdy and comfortable house for each worker, equipped with furniture and leisure conveniences. Each

To the accompaniment of warbling birds, Mrs. Jorge savours the fragrance of the forest. Lush green stands of trees rise on both banks of the river. "They are my jewels," she says. For her, these emeralds of Cauto are gems that commemorate the rebirth of the river and the spirit of the people who live along its shores. ■

Alberto D. Pérez is the communications officer in UNDP Cuba.

Restoration of the land has been a boon for families along the river, allowing them to grow enough produce to earn extra income.

Restoring an Oasis Strengthens Communities in Jordan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NICHOLAS GOUEDE

AZRAQ, JORDAN

The Azraq oasis was heralded in times past as a unique green paradise. Located in Jordan's eastern desert near the border with Iraq, it once supported a rich biodiversity and was a stopover for hundreds of thousands of migrating birds. But increasing demand for water in the greater Amman area (home to half of Jordan's 5.5 million people) led to large-scale pumping of the Azraq basin in recent decades. By 1993, after more than 20 years of intensive extraction, the underground springs giving life to the oasis had dried so completely that wildfires burned across a parched landscape.

Today, the Azraq ("blue" in Arabic) wetlands are staging a remarkable recovery thanks to a multifaceted project co-financed and managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its capacity as an implementing agency for the Global Environment Facility (GEF). GEF's role is to provide grants and concessional funding to eligible countries for initiatives that protect the global environment and promote sustainable economic growth. Other partners include various Jordanian Government agencies and the country's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). As water has been replenished, "many of the birds for which the oasis was renowned are coming back," according to Chris Johnson, Director of Development for RSCN. "Over 160 bird species have returned to the wetlands, among them blue-necked ostriches and Nubian ibexes."

But it is not just an ecological transformation that has occurred. "Clearly, the GEF-UNDP project has had an impact on biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation in Azraq," says Nadia Mohammad Juhari, a senior environmental protection expert and the GEF coordinator in the Ministry of Planning. "The impact is most pronounced in such areas as income-generating opportunities for women, and increased public awareness of the value of protected areas in an arid region."

Life-changing experience

To ensure sustainable livelihoods in the local community, a programme to benefit local Bedouin and Druse women has been developed. For example, as part of an eco-tourism strategy, young single women have been trained to make handicrafts from reeds in the oasis, in the form of school bags, water bottles and decorative boxes featuring local wildlife motifs, which also feature on delicately painted ostrich eggs that the women fashion. "All the designs have been taken from ancient rock carvings found around Jordan's protected areas," says Johnson.

"My whole life has changed now because of this project," says Samiha Tarabay, a 27-year-old Druse woman from the village of South Azraq, a tradi-

Bridge to the past and a better future.

tional caravan stopping point close to the Iraqi border. She explained that like many women of similar age in her village, she had never before had a paying job, or had lived away from her parents. Now, equipped with new skills and an income, she can afford to have a place of her own and enjoys the experience and self-esteem of a productive working life.

Meanwhile, although the Azraq oasis project has revived habitats critical for the survival of fauna and flora in the region, succeeded in creating new livelihoods for women, and built strong community support for those goals, long-term solutions will require fundamental changes in national water policy to ease pressure from growing urban demand for water supplies. The Government of Jordan is moving in that direction. A large-scale water management project to supply an additional 100 million cubic metres per year to Amman is to be launched. The 325-kilometre pipeline will run from the Disi Aquifer in southern Jordan; the four-and-a-half year construction project is expected to cost an estimated US$600 million.

"The government is contributing $200 million of the total financing, with the rest expected to come from the private sector," says Kamal Khdier, Director of the Water, Environment and Tourism Department in the Ministry of Planning. "This project will hopefully relieve pressure from pumping water from the Azraq wetlands." Institutions that have helped manage the Azraq Oasis Conservation Project include Jordan's Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Ministry of Agriculture, University of Jordan, General Corporation for Environmental Cooperation and RSCN.

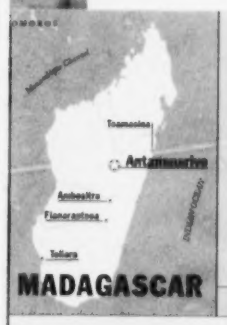
"The RSCN has provided a positive working environment and dynamic leadership for the past few years," says Costante Muzio, UNDP Resident Representative in Jordan. "They plan to expand work on pumping water back into the oasis, strengthening the ecosystem and promoting eco-tourism. So far, however, the water flow is just enough to support 10 percent of the wetlands that once existed. That's why an international commitment is needed to sustain the project." ■

Nicholas Gouede is a communications officer in UNDP New York.

Women of South Azraq village say they are proud to have paying jobs and enjoy economic independence for the first time.

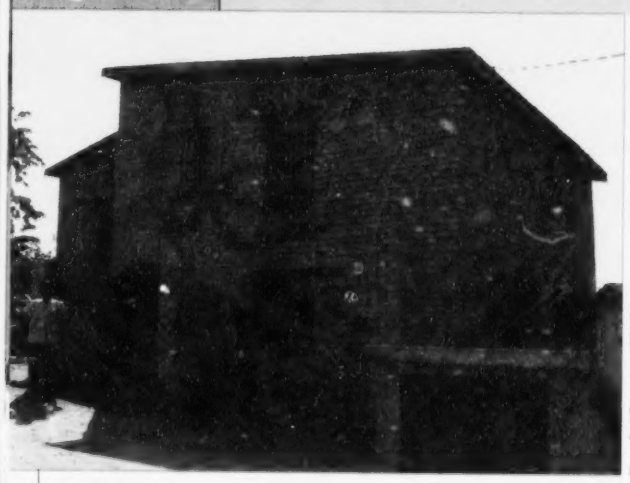
Left and above: Remarkable restoration of the Azraq oasis heralds better life for inhabitants after decades of environmental ruin.

Handicrafts on sale.



MicroStart Makes a Difference

BY ERICK RABEMANANORO



The joy of building a home of one's own.

ANTANANARIVO, MADAGASCAR

One of the biggest obstacles for poor people in developing countries as they seek to better their lives is lack of access to financial services. This situation is particularly acute in Madagascar, where, according to one study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), there may be as many as 2.5 million "informal" businesses in this island-nation of 16 million people. All too often, their only recourse to capital is to deal with moneylenders who charge usurious rates, often in excess of 100 percent per month.

It's because of this situation that enabling people to get access to micro-loans through other means is a key element of UNDP's work in Madagascar, one of 25 countries in which UNDP's MicroStart programme operates, utilizing the established credit portfolio of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), a programme managed by UNDP.

Voavonjoy Tirisoa, 38, is a mother of eight and a model of how MicroStart can make a difference. In the first two years since she joined the programme she earned enough as a street vendor to build a house for her family. She began in 1999 with a loan equivalent to US$21, with which she bought a small stock of rice to resell. Little by little, demonstrating proof of her trustworthiness and business acumen, she was allowed to take increasing larger loans, to a total of $400, and has gone into another line that offers a higher profit margin than rice. "I have a nest-egg now, and my children can go to school," says Mrs. Tirisoa. "We always have food on the table, and not only that, I can meet my loan payments with no trouble at all."

No more living from day to day

Mrs. Tirisoa is one of 3,200 women who have benefited from MicroStart loans in Madagascar. The women share demonstrated proof of their will to pull themselves out of poverty. While what recipients do with their business loans varies, most become involved in trade of one kind or another.

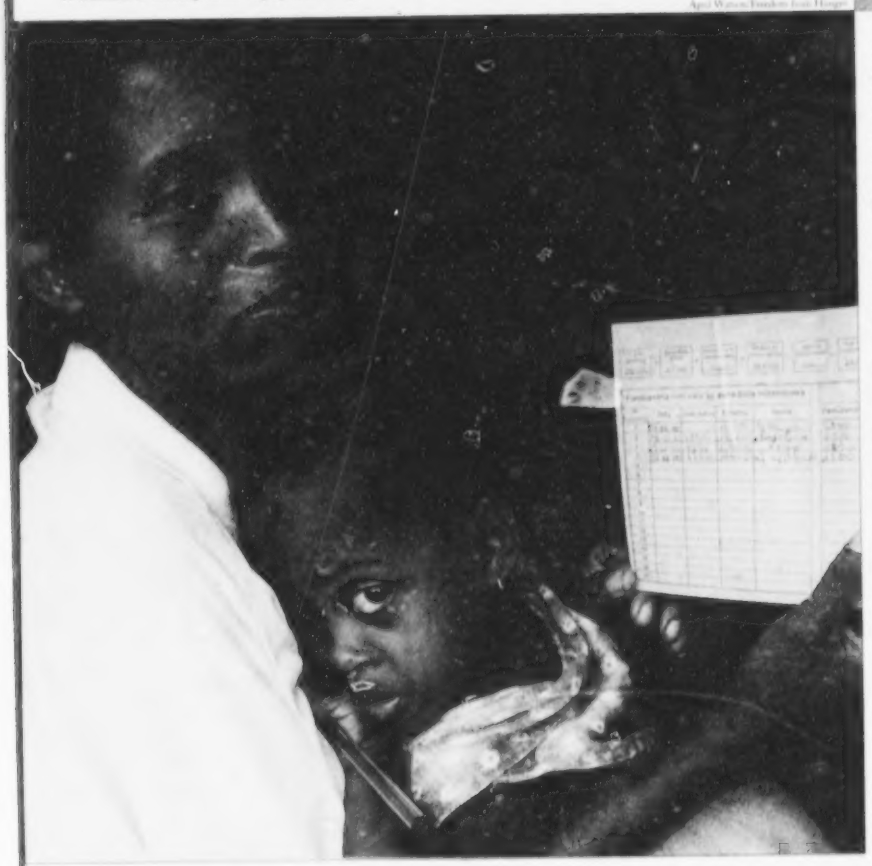
Rasoa Bertine, of Zanaposa, in the Ambositra district, says: "I started with an eatery in a brushwood shack. It was so cold, we had to build walls out of mud. Now, we have built ourselves a brick house." She uses the ground floor as the restaurant and the family lives upstairs. Mrs. Bertine has also diversified; she sells food staples, too. She is also a leader in the Soafaniry Association, an affiliate of Haingonala, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is UNDP's partner in Ambositra.

At the Haingonala cooperative: Settling loans on time is a matter of great pride.

Rasoa Bertine started a business selling meals from a wooden shack. She has since become a community leader of her lending association.

Women pledge their readiness to meet commitments.

A woman's weekly loan repayment log.



Even women who have only recently started working with MicroStart have been seeing tangible benefits. Rahantanirina Viviane is a craftswoman. After just five months with MicroStart, a lot has changed for her: "Before, I used to buy wood for sculpting to sell retail—piece by piece, two or three kilos a day. I had to sell my carvings the same day. And not only that, I had to split what I got between food for myself and buying more wood the next day. Now I buy my wood wholesale, in large lots, and cheaper."

Since 1999, UNDP has made $565,000 in lines of credit and operating costs for the programme. Field operations involve close collaboration between UNDP and partners including the national NGO *Entreprendre a Madagascar*, the American NGO *Freedom from Hunger* and the financial institutions. In addition to Haingonala, in Ambositra, there are four others issuing MicroStart loans in other provinces: Tiavo and Tamifi (in Fianarantsoa); Volamahasoa (Toliara); and OTIV (Toamasina). The spread has been gradual, according to UNDP Programme Officer Lousiette Ranorovololona, who says: "When we began, our main concern was finding financial institutions with experience and the capability to work in a rural environment."

Innovative principles at work

MicroStart is based on two innovative principles. The first is one of women banding together into associations whose members act in solidarity as loan guarantors. "We try hard to look after each other and help one another so that the repayments are made," says Beby Edmee, who chairs the Mila Vonjy Association in Fianarantsoa. The system is bearing fruit: if an association member does not pay back her loan, no other member of her circle can have one. The second principle is that credit is linked to education: women who are given loans are trained not only to manage their projects but receive health and nutrition lessons, for example. The effectiveness of such an approach is reflected in the loan repayment rate, which is more than 95 percent. During a first round of credit, a new client is limited to a maximum of $50. All loans are repayable over four months until the fifth round, when the term can be five months.

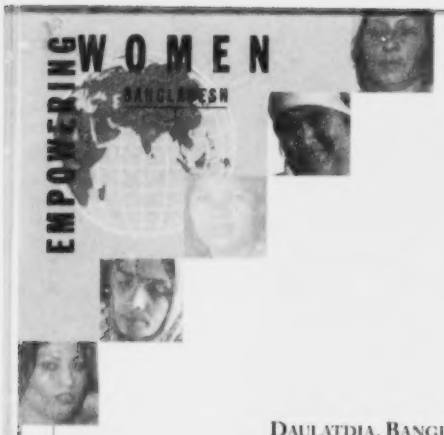
"Working with MicroStart has enabled my NGO to expand both the scope and scale of our activities," says Rakotoniaina Michel, the Director of Haingonala.

For her part, Ramaronoro Lucienne, Tiavo's Credit Officer, says she gets great satisfaction from seeing women succeed. "I am happy because the message is getting through. We always tell the beneficiaries that they should have an objective and should not be happy with just finding enough so they can eat."

Naivo Marius Rakotozafindrainibe is the National Coordinator of the UNDP Programme for Poverty Alleviation. "Inasmuch as the beneficiaries of MicroStart loans are full citizens and their income rises, so too does the provinces' income and that of the nation."

The last word goes to Mrs. Tirisoa. "With the improvement in my standard of living, I've made a great effort to send my children to private schools. My children's education is absolutely essential because it's all I can give them as a heritage. I want them to live just as much like human beings as anyone else." ■

Erick Rabemananoro is the communications officer in UNIC Madagascar.

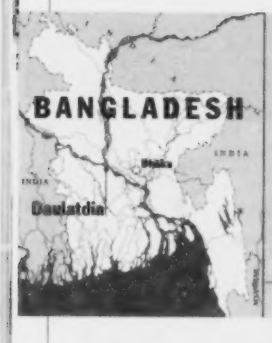


DAULATDIA, BANGLADESH

"Don't you think I am bad?" asks 19-year-old Lucky, a commercial sex worker in a large brothel next to the railway station in this town about three hours ride from the capital city, Dhaka. Here, some 3,000 sex workers and their children live in a ghetto of one-room shacks by a narrow wooden bridge that leads to the station.

"I was born here; my mother is still here," she says. I have two brothers and a sister here; I don't want my brothers to end up like this."

Safia Begum, 26, mother of a four-year-old boy, came to Daulatdia one year ago. "I left Gopalgong, my native region, because my husband married another woman. I did not have any food. A lady lured me here with a job offer in the garment industry. But when I got here, I found out it was a brothel."



Ray of Hope for Sex Workers and their Children

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEPHEN SHAMES

The misery born of the poverty, exploitation and despair that these women's stories exemplify is the reason that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Bangladesh have joined hands to offer this group of women a measure of education, and social and health care. Thanks to two initiatives funded by UNDP and the government, Lucky, her siblings, and Mrs. Begum and her son have at least a ray of hope.

One programme, which started in 2000, is called Capacity-Building, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Livelihood of the Socially Disadvantaged Women and their Children (CBP). It focuses on a group of about 1,100 sex workers in Daulatdia, providing them with education, vocational training and a health clinic, while offering their children the possibility of a normal education. There are boarding facilities for adolescent girls. For infants, there are childcare facilities known as creches.

"I want to work outside (the brothel)," says Lucky, "so I need an education. I want any kind of job; I want to be like other people." To reach her goal, Lucky sits on the ground with a dozen other women every other day for an hour, doing first grade work.

"The classes are great," says Beauty, 25, another sex worker who is also a student. "I did not know how to read before. If I am educated, then I will be able to teach my four-year-old daughter to become a good citizen. I do not want her to be in this profession."

Under the programmme, administered by the non-governmental organization (NGO) PIACT Bangladesh, pre-school daycare is provided as preparation for entry into the formal education system. "Now 50 kids are in formal school," says Fazlul Hague Fakir, CBP's deputy coordinator. "It was a bit difficult in the beginning," he adds, referring to the social

Lured into the sex trade by poverty.

stigma attached to children of sex workers. "We met with the school committee and discussed the problem," Mr. Fakir says. To keep them away from the dangers of brothel life, 40 adolescent girls have been selected for boarding facilities, where they receive food, schooling and vocational training. There is also a nursery programme under which about 30 infants are able to receive round-the-clock care.

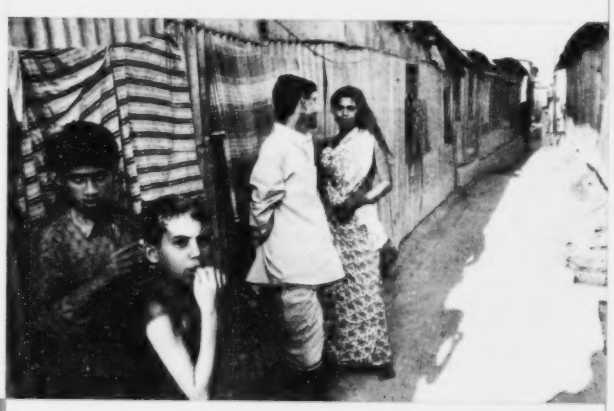
Education and support

A second UNDP-funded initiative in Rajbari focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention and education. As part of it, a health clinic has been established within the brothel by the Daulatdia railway station. There, a doctor and two paramedics treat minor illnesses and sexually transmitted diseases, and perform minor surgery. The clinic staff stress prevention. "The problem for sex workers is that HIV/AIDS is their last priority; they think of their children and housing first," says UNDP Programme Officer Ayaka Matsuno. "Capacity building complements what we are doing. Just because someone has information doesn't mean they will change. You have to provide them with support and services."

While NGOs have had a long involvement in the community, the focus on HIV/AIDS is a relatively recent one. In addition to educating sex workers, the prevention campaign has been extended to their clients and young people in the town. "It is not enough to educate the sex worker," says Abu Yusuf Choudhury, Director of PIACT. "Because of resistance by clients to using condoms, the women don't insist. So we thought we should intervene at the client level."

The Multisectoral Alleviation Project (MAP) also employs a folk singer to perform all day in the main Daulatdia brothel and railway station. PIACT has bought a building nearby where young men of the community and clients of the sex workers come to watch educational videos. The HIV/AIDS awareness programmes are followed by group discussions. Billboards are also utilized to accomplish the vital task of raising consciousness about the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

All these things amount to a significant breakthrough, according to Senthil Kumar, a consultant with the UN Office for Project Services who works with the Bangladeshi Ministry of Health and Ministry of Information officials. "Last year the government got behind the project. They put up billboards about condoms and—for the first time—television ads," he says. "It was a big achievement to involve the government."



Above: Vocational training for young women is a priority.

Left: Paramedic examines a sex worker at the brothel's clinic.

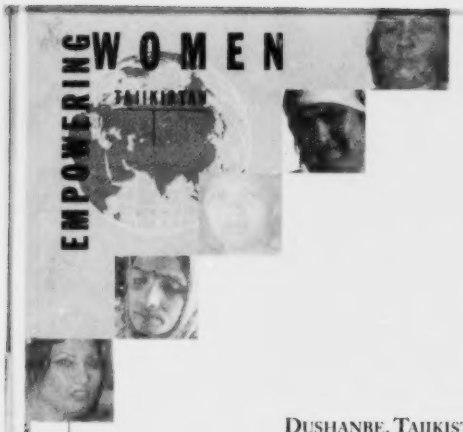
And is the holistic approach working?

The sex worker called Beauty considers the question. "I lost my father and mother in early childhood," she says. "I was brought up by a woman who was engaged in this profession. She brought me here when I was 12 years old and I'm still here. I don't have anybody, so where should I go? Now I have hope to educate my daughter. I never want her to become like me." ■

Stephen Shames is an award-winning photojournalist who specializes in social issues.

Above: Sex worker and client.

Left: Sanctuary within a world of entrapment: children of sex workers learning to read.



The Banker from Jamaat Karasu

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CLIVE SHIRLEY

DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN

It's a short, bumpy drive from the capital city of Dushanbe to the 29,000-strong community of Jamaat Karasu, in the district of Kofarnihon. The road is the legacy of Soviet occupation, the potholes the result of a decade of economic upheaval and international isolation since Tajikistan's independence. This road has only been open since 2000 because of anti-government resistance dating back to the country's 1992-1993 civil war.

As the sun casts long shadows over an arid countryside, a two-storey brick building starts to hum with activity as 10 seamstresses dressed in bright aprons and boots begin their shift. Starting their workday at nightfall, when the community's electrical plant kicks into gear, they bustle between sewing machines and a cutting area of the factory in which they make everything from wedding dresses to uniforms, undergarments to bedding for Tajikistan Railways.

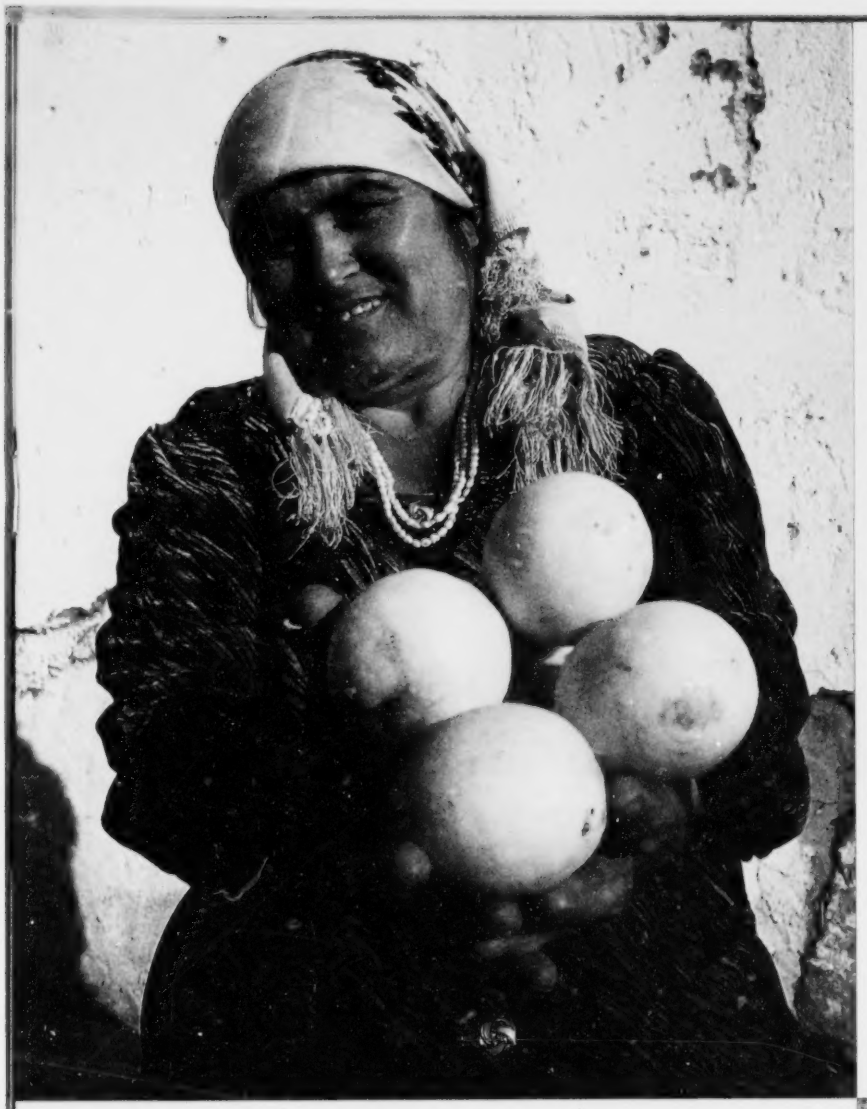
Rano Tabarova walks among the women in a full-length leather coat. She does not own the business; she is here to monitor its financial progress. She is its banker. The factory's owner, Safargul Nazarova, first approached Mrs. Tabarova two years ago to ask for a US$6,000 loan from the Bonuvon Women's Centre, the local non-governmental organization that Mrs. Tabarova directs.

After careful consideration, the approval committee—each of its six members is a beneficiary of a microloan herself—said yes. And so Mrs. Nazarova, with her 31 years of experience working at home on her own sewing machine, began her new life as an entrepreneur with a staff of 10. Mrs. Tabarova says her committee, which had approved loan requests before, for everything from bee-keeping to carpet making to seed purchases for small farms, said the decision was a tough one. "We always consider an applicant's experience, history and standing in the community. This is one of the largest loans we have ever given. Six thousand US dollars is a lot of money here. Our schoolteacher earns $20 per month."

The centre has issued more than 2,700 microloans since it received an initial grant of $51,000 in 1996 from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The lending scheme followed the Government of Tajikistan's establishment of the Women in Development Bureau to introduce small enterprise development in the war-scarred Kofarnihon region, wracked by an estimated 90 percent unemployment rate among women. Since it started running micro-

Rano Tabarova, director of Tajikistan's Bonuvon Women's Centre, is a former microloan recipient herself.

Clothing made and worn with pride.



Many microloans issued in Tajikistan go to help women secure the living they make as small farmers.

credit activities in the area for UNDP—it became self-financing in 1999—the centre has also established a business school, with courses on entrepreneurship, accounting, business planning and laws concerning small and medium enterprises.

Nouchine Yavari-d'Hellencourt, coordinator for the United Nations Development Fund for Women in Tajikistan, stresses the need for such gender-focused education. "Poverty in Tajikistan is female," she says. The legal system does technically protect women. Alimony is set in Tajik law at 25 percent of the man's income for a single child up to a maximum of 50 percent for four children or more. Polygamy is illegal, and upon divorce, women are entitled to an even split of family property.

"The reality is different," Ms. Yavari-d'Hellencourt says, explaining that poverty forces women to accept polygamy, while alimony payments are almost unknown. A new wife may move to her husband's parents' house and tend to chores as well as hold down a job. Daughters are excluded from inheriting wealth from their parents. Women also suffer from being marginalized by an education system in which it is widely accepted that it is more important to marry than attend school. While the legal age for marriage in Tajikistan is 17, this is largely a technicality because few rural marriages are legally registered. It is common for 14-year-old girls to wed.

"If we do not empower women, there will be no peace and no way out of poverty," says Ms. Yavari-d'Hellencourt.

Zebiniso Kholnazarova is a 41-year-old widow with four children. A difficult situation anywhere, such a burden is all the greater in a country whose women have lost their husbands either to the civil war or the demands of poverty. Many men have flocked to Russia to find work to support their families, but end up settling with new ones, abandoning those left behind. But Mrs. Kholnazarova has prevailed. In 1996 she needed a mere $4 loan to buy wheat seeds for her one-sixth of a hectare plot. She managed to repay the centre just three months later and has since borrowed and repaid almost all of an additional $300 she needed to rent and cultivate more land.

In Jamaat Karasu, seeds flourish into crops, bees produce honey and—when there is electricity—sewing machines whir. Capital is in the hands of the women's centre's capable members. As for the name "Bonuvon," Mrs. Tabarova explains it means "lady"—because "women here need something hopeful, something beautiful." ■

Clive Shirley is a photographer and writer based in Toronto. He has worked extensively in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Daughters are excluded from inheriting wealth.

Factory workers in Jamaat Karasu enjoying a break.

Photo: Naomi Lesh/UNDP

A Conversation with NOELEEN HEYZER

Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women

In an interview with CHOICES Editor Dave Todd, Ms. Heyzer offers a candid perspective on where the international community is making significant progress—and where it is lagging—in addressing gender equality issues and the global problem of violence towards women. She has been UNIFEM's Executive Director since 1994.

During the 1990s, governments made many commitments to the advancement of women through a series of UN conferences, new human rights instruments and other means. How much progress has been made in translating these into results?

What the UN conferences did was build political will and commitments across nations; that itself was a major achievement. But progress on the ground has been uneven. HIV/AIDS has been a major burden on women's lives, especially in Africa and the Caribbean. In many countries in conflict, progress made was lost because there were breakdowns in economic or state systems. This has been so in parts of Africa and Eastern Europe. At the same time, worldwide, women had made more progress in certain fields than others. Investment in women's education and health care has improved in many countries. But in women's leadership, that is less clear. Even over time, few women have been able to make decisions about the future of their countries.

I would say that there has been much progress in terms of international instruments of accountability. In post-conflict countries, like East Timor, precisely because there was already agreement in the international community about women's participation, it's been much easier for us to encourage women to participate in elections and get involved in voter education. So in that sense—if I look at the space in which I had to work about 10 years ago and now—it is much better; you need not fight so much to get issues accepted.

On balance, is the world moving ahead or losing ground in addressing the issue of violence towards women?

It used to be a very silent issue, one that was covered in shame. Women's groups have dealt with violence towards women for many years. But to get governments to take responsibility, to change legal frameworks, and to get police and criminal justice systems to take it seriously—these were major achievements. UNIFEM was instrumental in pulling the whole UN system together on this issue. The UN interagency campaigns changed public opinion and resource allocation at governmental and UN levels. We were able to mobilize new constituencies of lawyers, police and media. The world now realizes that women's security is a key indicator of human security and functioning states.

What I find worrying is the spread of criminality. This is linked to failed economies, failed states and failed traditional protection systems, and therefore people feel more insecure and vulnerable. With the weakening of borders, you now have transnational criminal networks and economies. If you have that situation side by side with failed economies, you will find more and more people using that other system of criminality and corruption, and the violence embedded in it, as a way of living. This definitely has led to an increase in the trafficking of women and girls. Drugs, and also the wars—community wars, ethnic wars—and the spread of small arms: all these have increased the level of violence in communities and therefore violence in women's lives.

The UN Security Council has authorized a global study of the effects of armed conflict on women and girls, and women's role in peacebuilding. How is UNIFEM contributing?

Security Council Resolution 1325 is historic. It puts the issue of women, peace and security on the international agenda. That is really important but more important still is making sure that in all discussions of countries in conflict, we look at

You need to bring in marginalized groups and the youth. As long as development and decision making exclude such people and they see no hope in the future, they will look for other alternatives.

the impact on women and girls, and what kinds of protection systems are being put in place for them, on the ground. The other issue that will come out of our report is the leadership role that women have been playing in peace and security, peace movements and holding communities together. To get that leadership recognized at the peace table and to make sure that when you include women, you are not just doing women a favour but the peace process itself benefits from bringing different perspectives together. Then the discussions change. What emerges frequently are issues that were previously absent from peace negotiations: education, the systematic rape of women and children born of rape. In post-conflict situations, you also have an opportunity to put in place new legal frameworks, and therefore the issue of gender justice could be incorporated to help countries to deal with new opportunities. So the UNIFEM study looks at all these issues, and at the UN itself in terms of its peacekeeping operations.

The UN, in planning for the recovery of Afghanistan, is pressing for women to be integrated into all aspects of reconstruction, and that there be an especially strong focus on girls' education. Would you elaborate?
We need to get the girls back in schools and to retrain women teachers. But you have a situation where the majority of women have not had access to education and there's a need to build up their local leadership in new ways, using non-traditional methods. Women are key players in recreating communities and in nation-building. But their contributions need to be valued, recognized and supported. Before the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996, 70 percent of teachers were women, and 40 percent of the medical personnel were women. We need to bring these people back and to encourage that kind of leadership at different levels—in the community, the civil service, the medical system, the teaching system. Building local capacity at different levels is extremely important to recreate the institutions, the alliances and the kinds of networks to get a country operating again. But equally important is the whole issue of women's economic security: to get women employed and to be paid decent wages. Also, to address the issue of violence against women and their protection. The one issue that keeps coming up is that women still do not feel secure, and this is why they're not sure how they should even dress or participate in public. Women's security is central to any public security reform being put in place, if we are to have long-term stability.

Looking beyond Afghanistan, what lessons do you think the international community ought to draw from it, with a view to redressing gender inequities in other conflicted and distressed nations?
One clear message is that gains should never be taken for granted; gains can be lost. Another message is that when we have programmes, we have to ensure there are institutions to deliver them equitably. It cannot be programmes only for one group of people, so that you have a situation like in Kabul where all the educated women were, but then there was such a big gap with the rest of the country.

You need to bring in marginalized groups and the youth. As long as development and decision making exclude such people and they see no hope in the future, they will look for other alternatives. When we cut basic services, the spaces we leave behind may be occupied by extremist groups. What I find disturbing, is that 10 to 15 years ago the focus was more on social development, the nature of economic growth, and what you did with it. Now, increasingly, I find myself dealing with breakdowns, wars, criminality, and issues of violence. We need to start reinvesting in the future. And we've got to have a more inclusive future. I think that if there's one lesson to learn from Afghanistan it's the consequences of exclusion and not investing in the right kinds of development, especially in the context of globalization where actions in remote areas can have devastating impacts even in the most secure places. The International Conference on Financing for Development is a good place to start reinvesting in human security. ■

AFGHANISTAN
The Challenges Ahead

Nation at the Crossroads

BY DAVID LOCKWOOD

Photo: Anu Rahman/UNDP

Clearing not just the rubble but the debris of a troubled history.

Proud, handsome, dignified people live at the crossroads of Asia: Pashtuns, Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kyrgyz. But Afghanistan, for a generation, has endured an intractable cycle of war, deprivation and poverty that has gradually been draining its lifeblood and self-respect. Now the whole world follows Afghanistan's struggle, and is as familiar with its peoples and warlords as the latest football scores. And as with East Timor and Kosovo, the UN is once again centre stage. Yet the country's new leaders and the international community that helped to establish the Afghanistan Interim Authority (AIA)—know full well that this is a last chance—both to provide sufficient support for the AIA to enable it to survive, and for Afghans to bury their differences.

The challenge is to broker a balance of power among enemies, and to find consensus—not just the will of a majority—within a new form of government, one that binds the nation without over-controlling its many provinces. It also must bring security to a population held to ransom for a generation by men with guns, and that respects traditional religious and social beliefs without the excesses of fundamentalism. Above all, the challenge is to enable a nation of farmers and traders to thrive in peace, with its citizens enjoying the benefits of development.

Building consensus around these goals begins with listening to the Afghans, and encouraging them to listen to one another. They will not easily agree on the best way forward, and must learn a new tolerance and mutual respect to accommodate vastly divergent views. Many of the more influential and talented among the elite left the country after the overthrow of King Mohammad Zahir, opposed to communist rule. Many western-educated, liberal technocrats fled after the communists fell, afraid of retribution by the conservative mujahideen; while even more fled during the battles to control Kabul by various mujahideen factions, won ultimately by the Taliban in 1996.

Now, as patriotism draws Afghans home again, whether from refugee camps or successful careers abroad, they bring the whole range of ambitions and principles reflecting their different backgrounds. Many dream that their homeland can be what it was when they left. The elite hope they can turn back the clock and recreate values and traditions they have not found in the West; they forget the causes of conflict in a society polarized by gaps between rich and poor, the modern and the traditional. It is certain that if government cannot bring the rule of law and the most basic services to its people in an economic environment where livelihoods thrive, then insecurity and hunger will continue to drive people from their villages and homeland.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Lakhdar Brahimi and his UN Mission have begun the daunting task of helping to steer post-crisis peacebuilding and recovery in the most difficult circumstances imaginable, working in support of the AIA's comprehensive agenda ranging from good governance to

Photo: Mona Knudsen/UNDP

A better future for children

poverty alleviation. Through a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) interim trust fund, thousands of civil servants who had gone unpaid for months are receiving income again—and the new Administration is asserting itself. Continued support must be sustained until revenue generation begins, which really means border and highway control, along with support for the national government by the regions and their various warlords. Paying the salaries of provincial and district personnel is a first step, but a national army and police are vital, and must be created from scratch.

In Tokyo in January, the international community responded to the AIA's plea for support by committing some US$4.5 billion for the next five years, and as much as $1.8 billion for 2002 alone, in addition to humanitarian commitments of around $400 million this year. But as AIA Chairman Hamid Karzai told the historic conference, speed is everything; it is essential that promises be translated rapidly into action. At Tokyo, the task of helping to lead the recovery effort was squarely thrown to UNDP, both in terms of its role in mobilizing support for the AIA's spending plans, and in getting reconstruction aid projects moving quickly. For the risk is great that delay will result in Afghanistan continuing to function again as a collection of regions controlled by those with arms. If so, it will leave open the question of whether well-meaning modernists who lack the means to deliver on promises are any better than the stern fundamentalist forces who brought peace at the expense of freedom and progress.

The challenge now is for the AIA to take the baton of leadership and ownership of the recovery and reconstruction process. The coming months will be a test of multilateralism, something that has been in general decline for a decade. But if there is any place where circumstances demand a UN-led sharing of responsibility, programming and action, it is in the complex political environment of Afghanistan. Pooling of efforts and resources is the best way to enable a reliable, predictable, long-term relationship of support for Afghan civil authorities as they embark on nationwide programmes, aimed at binding the country together.

To that end, the ambitious international effort that has now begun amounts to both an act of faith and demonstration of trust in the capacity of Afghanistan's people to overcome the burden of their recent history. ■

David Lockwood is UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, with special responsibility for Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN FACTS

■ At least 1.5 million Afghans have been killed since the 1979-1989 war against the Soviets and in civil warfare since then. About 1.2 million people are displaced internally. Six million people have fled to Iran and Pakistan in the last 23 years; five million remain there—the world's largest refugee population.

■ Before the Taliban took Kabul in 1996 and banned women from working, 50 percent of government employees, 70 percent of schoolteachers and 40 percent of doctors were women.

■ Thirty-nine percent of boys and three percent of girls attend primary school. More than 90 percent of school-age girls cannot read.

■ The infant mortality rate is 165 per 1,000 live births; 257 of every 1,000 children born die before age five. Life expectancy at birth is 41 years of age.

■ There is one physician for every 50,000 people in Afghanistan. Seventeen out of 1,000 pregnant women per year die in childbirth. Only 11 of the country's 31 provinces have essential obstetric care services.

■ Twenty-three percent of people have access to safe water (five percent rural, 40 percent urban).

■ Twelve percent of the population have adequate sanitation.

■ More than 700 square kilometres of land is contaminated by landmines and other ordnance that kill about 10 people a day. There are an estimated 10 million mines.

■ In 1999 Afghanistan produced 75 percent of the world's illicit opium. In some provinces up to 95 percent of households earned income from selling opium.

■ There is one telephone line per 1,000 inhabitants.

Sources: United Nations and affiliated agencies.

Photo: Jacqueline Mia Foster/UNDP

Afghanistan's Women: The Power of Their Endurance

BY SITARA*

The basic principle, nonetheless, should be that change cannot be imposed; it must be facilitated.

Afghanistan is a land faced with the challenge of re-building itself from utter ruin, a country where every 30 minutes a mother dies of pregnancy-related complications and where 70 percent of all tuberculosis cases are those of women. Over the past two decades, the enormity of what has been destroyed by war and conflict has overwhelmed Afghan society. The physical infrastructure, the economy, institutions, political processes have all come undone.

Yet there is one new and positive reality today, amid all the clamour of voices expressing the needs of various segments of the population. A group talking about social structures, coping mechanisms and an end to social trauma—in short, social capital. I am referring to Afghan women.

Sitara, pictured above.

The women of Afghanistan have walked a long and painful path through the years and have learned a great deal about the skills required to survive. The world has taken notice and is raising concern about the status of Afghan women; many who have been compelled to live in exile have spoken out from around the globe on important truths. In the past, the struggle for the human rights of all Afghans—but of women in particular—has suffered serious setbacks through the advocacy for these rights being misused by some for political gain. There have been times when advocacy efforts have been ill-informed, and the voices of the silent majority of Afghan women about their issues and priorities have not been heard or fairly reflected. Often the most visible of the issues has been taken as the most important one. The wearing of the *burqa* is a classic example. More recently, there have been cases that have seen influential news media misleading audiences into believing that the end of Taliban control means that Afghan women will now enjoy all their rights.

Some of us also tend to believe that the provision of basic social services, such as access to health care and basic education will result in women's empowerment. However, the fulfilment of such needs, while they may relieve the Afghan woman of the immense responsibility she has for her survival and that of her children, of itself brings very little change in her social status. Achieving empowerment and social inclusion begin only after such needs are fulfilled.

The issues facing the women of my country are, in fact, deeply rooted in social behaviours and practices. Their limited role in the public sphere, or exclusion from it, amount only to symptoms. What is needed is a change in social behaviour through awareness raising, education, communication and dialogue with those who take decisions. Women's empowerment should be integral to the country's development agenda and presented as a means of achieving prosperity for the family unit.

Photo: UNDP

Top and right: Girls are getting an education again.

There is a need to build trust among communities: that a just and balanced social role for women does not mean changed cultural values. In fact, it only requires a changed perception of these social and cultural values. However, the key factor for this social change to be realized is the political will of those who govern the country. The strength and sincerity of this political resolve will be indicated by the degree of inclusiveness in the new legal system to be introduced in Afghanistan, the fairness with which it will be implemented and the protection it will give to women. It is vital that the equitable principles of Islam are put into practice, and that culture and tradition are not exploited to reinforce unfair practices.

Succeeding in empowering women and achieving their greater participation in society is a challenge. Above all, it requires persistence. Meanwhile, there is no shortage of lessons that have been learned. Our hands are not empty and we are not starting from zero. We now have a chance to rebuild the country and its institutions, from the ground up. We have social values that we want to reassert. We have hope for the future. We have the will to give our children a fair and equal society. But above all, we must rise to the challenge before us. ■

Sitara is a Programme Officer and gender issues specialist in UNDP. She lived for many years in exile in Pakistan.

** Sitara, like some Afghans, has only one name.*

Afghan Nationals in Vanguard of UNDP Initiative

BY SALMA ZULFIQAR

KABUL

For Salim Qayum, a national staff member with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kabul, being at the forefront of the reconstruction effort in his country is like a dream come true. "I will contribute as much as possible and I hope and pray for a good future for Afghanistan," he says. "This is a good chance for us and what people keep saying is: 'Don't miss out on it.' "

Born and raised in District Nine, close to downtown Kabul, Mr. Qayum explains that after more than two decades of war, one of the most pressing needs is to restore the economic viability of local communities. One of his main responsibilities—he has been with UNDP for two years—is to liaise with the country's Interim Administration, its technical advisers and non-governmental organizations, as part of the effort to develop an overall plan. As one of its first recovery projects, UNDP is assisting with the reconstruction of some 30 ministerial buildings in the capital. "We are providing them with the technical know how," Mr. Qayum says, adding that one of the first priorities has been to winterize the buildings. "The windows are shattered, the doors are broken, the buildings are cold; people cannot work like this," he says.

Noting the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead, Mr. Qayum stresses the necessity of Afghans and their benefactors realizing that there can be no quick fixes. "The country has been destroyed over 20 years, and it will not take two years to rebuild; we are looking at 20 years, maybe," he predicts, adding: "Once we rebuild Afghanistan, we have to make sure that it moves with the times, and is not stuck in medieval times. There is a great need for new technology to be introduced; this is the way forward for our country."

A need to help Afghans regain trust

Nafisa Nezam, a Programme Officer for the UN Office for Project Services, works alongside her Afghan UNDP colleagues. Involved in community development work in Afghanistan since 1985, but forbidden to work after the Taliban seized power in 1996, Ms. Nezam recently returned home to the capital. Asked how she feels about her new role, she beams and says: "I was so excited when I came back to Kabul. Who else is going to do this, if we don't? Our country needs us now more than ever."

Emphasizing the importance of having a strong complement of Afghan staff, Wuria Karadaghy, Senior Programme Coordinator for the UNDP/PEACE Programme in Afghanistan, says "the social infrastructure needs to be upgraded and this can only be done by Afghans themselves with our support. Afghans built the country brick by brick. We must remember that Afghanistan is not Kosovo and the UN is not taking the lead role here." He adds that over the past two decades "experience shows that Afghans have lost their trust in the outside world. We need to help them regain trust; we must ensure that."

To that end, one of the earliest initiatives developed through UNDP is the US$3 million Recovery Employment of Afghanistan Programme, funded by the Government of Japan and implemented directly by the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA). Launched earlier this year, it will employ some 12,000 workers to clear and recycle rubble in Kabul, fashioning it into construction materials. Getting cash income circulating at a grassroots level through the local economy is another key objective, with the AIA identifying workers, including internally displaced people, women, the disabled and demobilized soldiers. ■

Salma Zulfiqar is a writer with the Integrated Regional Information Network, of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. She is based in Islamabad.

THE RECONSTRUCTION AGENDA

International assistance to support Afghanistan's economic and social recovery and reconstruction is being guided by a comprehensive effort to catalogue both the country's most urgent short-term priorities as well as options for longer-term development initiatives.

A preliminary assessment of these needs—prepared by the World Bank, UNDP and the Asian Development Bank at the request of potential donor governments—served as the key working document for the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan, held in Tokyo on 21-22 January 2002. There, with ministers and representatives from 61 countries and 21 international organizations in attendance, over US$4.5 billion for the next five years was promised towards rebuilding Afghanistan. This includes more than $1.8 billion in firm commitments, pledges and contributions this year.

Photo: UNDP Japan

UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown (left) in Tokyo with Afghan Interim Authority leader Hamid Karzai (centre).

The initial assessment foresees a need for $15 billion over the next decade, exclusive of humanitarian aid, which is not covered by the report. The authors caution, however, that given past turmoil, much of the currently available data on Afghanistan is out of date and that because of time and security constraints in the lead-up to Tokyo, there was no opportunity to field test available information.

The Afghan Interim Authority has since identified its key priority areas for the channelling of reconstruction assistance. They include:

- **Enhancement of administrative capacity, with emphasis on the payment of salaries and establishment of the government administration.**
- **Education, especially for girls.**
- **Health and sanitation.**
- **Infrastructure, in particular, roads, the electric power system and telecommunications.**
- **Reconstruction of the economic system, with urgent attention given to the severe shortage of currency.**
- **Agriculture and rural development, including food security, water management and revitalizing the irrigation system.**

By Tala Dowlatshahi, media consultant with the Communications Office in UNDP New York.

Toward A New Social Contract

BY LAKHDAR BRAHIMI

To assist Afghans in recovering their country, the international community has begun what is likely to prove the largest post-conflict aid programme anywhere since the Marshall Plan for Europe after the Second World War.

The International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan that was held in Tokyo in January—co-chaired by the European Union, the Governments of Japan, Saudi Arabia and the United States—has anchored the process of reconstruction in firm commitments of more than US$4.5 billion over the next five years. But this historic demonstration of international solidarity with the Afghan people was about much more than financing for the development of a workable nation-state. It was also about bringing peace and stability to a turbulent region. It is notable that in the wake of the Tokyo conference, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan went to Afghanistan, the first such visit since that of Dag Hammarskjöld 42 years earlier.

Photo: UN/DPI

It is essential that there be a tangible peace dividend, to give Afghans the confidence to unite around the political process.

For more than 20 years, Afghanistan has been disintegrating—politically, socially, economically—with increasingly horrific consequences, both for itself and its neighbours. There was no government in Kabul capable of delivering basic social services or guaranteeing personal security; a vicious cycle of violent conflict continued with no end in sight; brutal violations of human rights and international norms became all too common. Today, there are five million Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

Now there is a moment of hope and the 25 million people of Afghanistan (including the refugee diaspora) have an unprecedented opportunity to build an effective state. Ordinary Afghans from every part of the country have indicated their desire to seize this moment. But they need both immediate and long-term international support. Such assistance needs to be rooted in the understanding that reconstruction and political recovery must go hand-in-hand. Experience in other post-conflict countries, such as El Salvador and Mozambique, demonstrates that reconstruction cannot be separated from the revival of legitimate national political institutions.

The UN as catalyst

Neither the UN nor any other external entity can substitute for a functioning state with popular support. Unfortunately, most Afghans have never known the state they live in to be anything other than a source of violence and abuse. Indeed, half of its citizens being under the age of 20, they cannot recall a time when their country was anything but dysfunctional. In that sense, reviving the social contract between the Afghan people and their government is a primary challenge.

In recent months, the UN has served as a catalyst, helping Afghans to agree on a framework for a broad-based government capable of earning public trust. We have helped to bring about the inauguration of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), which for the moment represents Afghanistan in all of its external relations, and occupies the country's seat at the UN and in its specialized agencies. Later this year there will be an emergency *Loya Jirga*, a traditional council of representatives from the country's various tribes and factions. Their challenge will be to establish a Transitional Authority to succeed the AIA in planning for the country's future development, pending the advent of a fully representative national government.

Meanwhile, it is essential that there be a tangible peace dividend, to give Afghans the confidence to unite around the political process. It is imperative to make it clear that there will be ample funding from the international community, so long as the Afghan authorities stay the course in establishing a representative and responsible government. In the longer term, the critical issue will be to ensure the capacity of the Afghan administration to manage reconstruction. Delays in delivering the necessary external funding, especially in these early days, risks undermining the entire effort. Regrettably, the need for emergency humanitarian relief still exists.

With the prospect of a fourth consecutive drought year looming, local agricultural capabilities are severely eroded. On a related front, we must ensure that Afghanistan's recovery is not derailed by heroin trafficking and the organized crime that accompanies it. Afghan's hard-pressed farmers need economic incentives to refrain from growing opium poppies. The UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention is pursuing this objective.

Afghanistan presents the UN with one of its most daunting challenges ever, as it does the entire international community. But the world cannot afford to fail. A stable Afghanistan—living in peace, protecting its people's rights, carrying out its international obligations, denying terrorists safe haven, posing no threat to any of its neighbours, and enjoying their respect and support—is an achievable objective. ■

Lakhdar Brahimi has been the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan since 1997.

Photo: Shabina Zaman/UNDP

UNDP GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

The True Meaning of Wealth

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan proclaims that "Gross National Happiness is more than Gross National Product." That is to say, Bhutan is a country that does not just value economic growth but also the contentment of its citizens and their spiritual wealth. What is the real meaning of wealth for people? Despite being a topic often embarked upon, I set out to find an answer to this difficult question.

After touching down at Palo International Airport, I savoured the smell of the grass; the calm wind flowing between the valleys felt gentle on my cheeks. I heard only the sound of the wind. From the airport building, finished in Bhutanese style with patterns of bright wooden window frames drawn onto white walls, one could already feel the culture and tradition at the entrance to this land.

The main focal points of my inspection were projects on information technologies (IT) and lemon grass oil and a protection area for Black-necked cranes. What surprised me most were the digital networks that have been set up in this country whose land rises from 200 to 7,000 metres, and whose people must struggle with a transportation infrastructure that is little-developed. The IT project, which began in 1991 with untied aid from Japan, was completed in 1998. The Internet service now in place is a big first step for Bhutan towards modernization and internationalization while, at the same time, it continues to treasure its own cultural heritage and promotes "unhurried development."

Then there is the production of home-grown lemon grass oil, which is Bhutan's own special job creation project. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting this project from the gathering of the lemon grass plant, through to production and distribution of it in the form of essential oil. At present up to 250 households are cultivating lemon grass which has already earned some US$200,000 through exports to Europe and India. I think this plan of turning weeds that even cows will not eat into money is a wonderful idea.

In Phobjikha, a winter migration area for the Black-necked crane, UNDP, local non-governmental organizations and people from the villages have joined hands and completed a 'Crane Centre' whose opening ceremony I attended. Funded through the Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility, the project is intended to protect the birds from threat of extinction, while attracting eco-tourists to the area.

During my week's stay in Bhutan, which began in the capital Thimphu, I did all my travel on a four-wheeled horse and cart, soldiering on through hours of hairpin curves on the mountain roads. The gentle expressions of the people we met on the roads made a strong impression on me and brought to mind Bhutan's Gross National Happiness philosophy, which is not just about people but gives such high priority to the environment as a whole. The Bhutanese hate killing living creatures because of their religious beliefs and this can be seen in the way they co-exist with and show consideration not just for their fellow human beings but for plants, animals and other life-forms.

For me, Bhutan is a country with dignity where people live happily; it is a developed country in environmental issues. I am glad that this time I have been able to see a kind of development that even if I searched all over the world, I perhaps might not find elsewhere. UNDP has been playing an important role in this country in raising policy issues and in partnering with other organizations. There is much trust in UNDP, which I too strongly felt and I believe we can thoroughly rely on its efforts. ■

Japanese actress and author Misako Konno has been a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador since October 1998.

Photo: UNDP/Japan

Misako Konno visits a project in Bhutan that produces lemon grass oil.

VIEWPOINT

Prospects for a New Global Deal for Sustainable Development

BY DEREK OSBORN

Ten years ago in Rio world leaders gathered at the first Earth Summit and mapped an ambitious agenda for making progress on the environment and development throughout the world. The Rio Declaration set out 27 general principles to guide sustainable development. Agenda 21 provided a detailed and comprehensive programme of action. The Climate Change Convention and the Biodiversity Convention set out frameworks for managing two of the world's biggest environmental problems.

Much of the Rio deal failed to materialize during the 1990s. Action under the two conventions was slow to get off the ground; Agenda 21 proved excellent for continuing debate and inspiring action at many levels and on many different topics around the world, but has yet to become a concrete programme with specific goals, means of implementing them and target dates for action. In many parts of the world the environment has continued to deteriorate. Levels of official development assistance from North to South have shrunk. The Global Environment Facility was confined to a narrow set of purposes and a limited budget. Trade regimes continued to favour the developed world alone. The gap between rich and poor widened globally and absolute levels of poverty increased in some of the poorest countries.

The 1997 review, five years after Rio, noted these trends but failed to generate sufficient political attention and commitment to arrest them. Can the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg this August do better? By coming together on the whole range of the sustainability agenda heads of government and other leaders will create a much wider awareness of how all the different elements fit together and reinforce one another. With political vision and leadership they could generate a much stronger determination to make progress on all the separate issues, uniting them in a new global deal for sustainability.

On Agenda 21, the Summit will be an opportunity to showcase sustainability through effective action. Regional programmes for sustainability will be especially important and the choice of South Africa as a venue is already showing its value in this context. South Africa has thrown itself into the preparations with vigour, and with other key countries of the region is developing ideas for an African partnership for sustainability—a potentially exciting Summit outcome.

On financing for development, world leaders could commit themselves to a programme of steady progress towards the 0.7 percent of annual Gross Domestic Product target for North to South development aid flows, with increased aid dedicated to reinforcing efforts towards meeting international development targets for poverty reduction, water, sanitation, energy, health and education programmes and natural resource protection. Since agreements on these lines failed to stick after Rio, there will need to be stronger machinery to secure faithful implementation on this occasion.

By coming together on the whole range of the sustainability agenda heads of government and other leaders will create a much wider awareness of how all the different elements fit together and reinforce one another.

On trade negotiations, leaders could strive for a deal that fully recognizes the needs of developing countries, especially for greater access and better terms of access to global markets. On climate change, leaders could work towards full ratification of the Kyoto and Marrakech accords by the time of the Summit so the mechanisms for implementing them can be brought into being there. The leaders could make the Summit the deadline for further steps under the conventions on biosafety, desertification, fishstocks, persistent organic pollutants and other key environmental issues.

There is a great need for a persuasive statement of the vision and goals of sustainability to help build understanding and support throughout society. The Earth Charter developed by the Earth Council and others is an eloquent statement on these lines. Collective endorsement of the charter at Johannesburg could build a stronger sense of the vision and goals of sustainability worldwide.

Crucial to a successful Summit outcome will be the recognition by developed countries of the scale of problems confronting many developing countries. For countries of the South the challenge will be to integrate the sustainability agenda effectively into their own development plans. Large changes requiring political leadership, sensitivity and readiness to adapt in all parts of society are needed: changes that should provide the basis for a new global deal that, this time, will not come unstuck in the next day or next year, but prove an enduring compact. ■

Derek Osborn is chairman of the International Institute of Environment and Development in London. He co-chairs the United Nations Environment and Development Forum, which is helping stakeholders from major groups around the world to prepare for the WSSD.